

Winter Play... You'll Be Sorry

By **BOB VAVREK**, *USGA Agronomist*

The winter-play bug bit some die-hard golfers this week. After a long spell of frigid temperatures, followed by a brief period of near record high temperatures, there came an almost uncontrollable urge to hit the links. A day near fifty degrees feels downright balmy after weeks of weather that barely "warms" up to the low twenties. Factor in the sunshine, the lack of snow cover this season, and perhaps a new driver from Santa and it's not too difficult to understand why superintendents have had to defend the decision to keep the course closed.

I wholeheartedly agree with their decisions to keep play off the turf. Previous Web site updates have warned golfers about foot traffic and this particular sequence of weather events as being especially detrimental to the playing surfaces.

Cold temperatures and the absence of an insulating blanket of snow were conditions that encouraged the development of deep frost in the ground this winter. Nights were cold even when the daytime temperatures climbed into the upper forties. The upper inch or two of turf thaws out by mid-afternoon on a warm, sunny day, but the soil profile beneath this thin zone of soft, unstable soil remains frozen. Traffic across partially thawed turf will cause rutting and possibly shear off a portion of the root system that is still anchored into the frozen soil. It should come as no surprise that winter golfers will want to play during the warmest part of the day...the time of the day when the potential for damaging the turf is the greatest.

Winter play is always a topic of considerable controversy across the northern tier of states. Some courses evidently have the ability to accommodate a limited amount of traffic across dormant, frozen turf better than other courses for reasons that are not always well understood. However play on partially frozen surfaces should always be avoided. Be safe, not sorry.

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ON THE ROAD WITH THE USGA

By: **R.A. (Bob) Brame**, *Director*

Wow, it's hard to believe that another year has rolled around. I sure hope the off-season is providing you some time of rest and relaxation. If not, there's plenty of winter yet ahead for reflection and planning. If 2001 taught us anything, it is that family and friends are a higher priority than work alone.

The next major turf conference in the lower portion of the North Central Region is the Midwest Turf Expo in Indianapolis starting on January 14th, 2002. Hope to see many of you there. The GCSAA International Turfgrass Conference and Show will follow in February, and, as always, it offers a host of opportunities to stay current with the golf turf management industry. The Orlando setting offers an excellent opportunity to take the family and combine business with pleasure.

January is the month our yearly invoicing is mailed out to those golf courses in our database. The mailing provides an opportunity to subscribe to our Turf Advisory Service in 2002, while also taking advantage of the early payment discount. If your course does not receive a mailing by mid-February, give us a call and we'll make the addition to our database. We look forward to working with you and your course. Should any questions arise about the invoicing or visit scheduling, give us a call.

While the first several weeks of December were very mild, winter has arrived. There were reports of greens being mowed as late as December 22nd. With the unmistakable arrival of winter equipment servicing can kick in at full throttle. Tree removal and drainage projects also are in full swing at many courses. The cold snap has stopped most construction projects and drainage work will also be coming to an end very soon, if it hasn't already.

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